

Last Dying Speech and full Confession, Of BENJAMIN BRETT, who was Executed at Bury St. Edmund's, on Monday August 11, 1794, for the inhuman Murder of Thomas Baker, an Infant of Three Years and Eight Months old, the natural Child of his third Wife.

BENJAMIN BRETT was born at Kedington, in Suffolk, of honest industrious parents, who brought up a family of eight children, by honest industry, who all, except this unhappy man, turned out useful members of society. He was about 38 years of age, and had married three wives, by whom he had eight children; having two by the first, five by the second, and one by the last, which is only 10 weeks old.

From the time of his commitment, to his trial, he behaved in a most exemplary manner, fervently and studiously applying himself to the Bible; and after trial seemed quite resigned to his unhappy fate; but obstinately refusing to prepare himself to receive the Sacrament before his awful sentence was put in execution.

He said, that on the day in which he committed the murder, he dined in a comfortable manner with his wife and children, but having been subject to a fever he was unable to go to his work that morning;—finding himself somewhat better after dinner, and being in poverty, he was desirous to go to work, if only for a few hours, to earn a trifle towards the support of himself and family (for he was naturally industrious).

Thomas Baker, the child, had often accompanied Brett to the field, and continued with him while at work; Brett said, he loved the child, as its innocent prattle delighted him while at work; he had not a thought of injuring the child when he left his home; but his passions being too often violent in the extreme, and his mind unenlightened, he was incapable of keeping them under restraint. He believed, he said, that his heart was by nature prone to evil, for at times he found himself happy for a few moments, but again relapsed into a gloomy, sullen, and morose state of mind; it was in this state he felt himself when he left his family on the day he committed this rash action. The child, he said, followed him as usual to his work, and crying bitterly (from what cause he the said Brett did not mention); he took hold of the boy by the breast of his coat, and throwing him forcibly on the ground, bruised the back part of his head in so violent a manner, that the poor child became senseless; upon which he raised him from the ground, and, wrapping him in his coat, laid him down, with the hope that the bruise that he had received would not occasion his death. He said he felt himself miserable when he saw the child had received so much injury; and, dreading to return again to his family, he wandered about the fields for some time, but on his return, finding the child grew worse, he, about 10 o'clock, took him in his arms and carried him home to his mother; and, informing her what he had done, desired her to give him something to recover him; she gave him some tea, which was of no use, as the child expired in two hours after he was conveyed home.—Brett, fearful of the consequences, and tormented by a consciousness of his crime, wandered from his cottage. A woman was sent for to assist in preparing the child for interment, who informed the Parish Officer of its death, which led to suspicion that it was murdered by Brett, as he had left his house and was known to be naturally cruel; strict search was made after him, from the Saturday to the Monday following, when he was discovered, late at night, crawling on his hands and knees in his own yard near the cottage; he was secured, and

conveyed to a magistrate, who committed him to prison.

He was tried on Saturday, August 9, before Lord Chief Justice Eyre, and condemned to be executed on the Monday following, and his body publicly dissected. During the whole time he appeared attentive and composed; he declared to the Judge, that he had no intention of murdering the child when he threw it down; that the cut it had received through its left ear, or the bruise on the back of the head, were not given by a spade, as had been reported, but by some hard substance on which the child fell; that the spots of blood which were on his coat he acknowledged he had covered with dust, to prevent its being seen.

Monday August 11, 1794.

This forenoon, about twelve o'clock, he was taken from the gaol, and conveyed in a cart to the place of execution; previous to his leaving the gaol, he shook hands with his fellow-prisoners, and took an affectionate and melancholy leave of them, when he appeared perfectly resigned to his wretched fate. When he arrived at the fatal tree, he prayed very fervently for some time, and then called for a Bible, which was procured for him, out of which he read several passages suitable to the occasion. After remaining near an hour, he was asked whether he was prepared for execution; he requested that he might be allowed another half hour, as he found himself not sufficiently strengthened in faith to appear in the presence of his Maker; a considerable time was allowed him, which was spent in a penitent manner. He said, he forgave all men as he hoped to be forgiven; that he was happy in being thus early taken away, lest he might have been led to commit more crimes, for he found his heart so prone to vice, that he could not avoid doing mischief. He appeared perfectly resigned and composed, and wore a pleasing smile on his countenance.

In the case of this unfortunate man, we have a striking example of the fatal effects of unsubdued passion.—In every circumstance of life, his vicious temper proved a bane in his cup of happiness.—Continually at variance with himself, he was very unfit to enjoy either the common bounties of life, or endure the more severe trials of adversity. Naturally implacable, he felt no power so strong in his mind as resentment, or cruelty. The prattling child, whom he says he loved, and whose infantile state claimed protection at his hand, is not capable of exciting one tender idea, or soothing his hardened soul; thus forgetting the ties of natural affection, which even savage nations venerate, he debases himself beneath the brute; and is hurried from one stage of criminality to another, till he at last forfeits his life by his crimes. He has said (with what degree of truth is doubtful), that he had no intention of committing murder; if he had no such intention, why practise such an unmerciful method of chastisement?—The violence of the act is equally unjustifiable, whether it had been productive of the child's death or not. To those who have the management of youth, it holds out a fair opportunity of inviting them to observe moderation in their correction; for it often happens, that those acts which may appear of small concern, are attended with dangerous consequences.

SUFFOLK
to wit.

A CALENDAR of the PRISONERS in the Custody of MARGARET BAKER, Keeper of his Majesty's Gaol of BURY ST. EDMUND'S, for Trial at the Summer Assizes, to be holden at the Shire-Hall, in the said County, on Thursday the 7th of August 1794, before the Right Honourable Lord Chief Justice EYRE, and Sir W. H. ASHHURST, Knight.

JAMES ANDREWS, Committed March 22, 1794, by George Pretyma, Esq. charged with feloniously entering the workshop belonging to the Workhouse Corporation of the Burgh of Bury St. Edmund's, and stealing thereout fifty pounds weight of wool, or thereabouts, the property of the said Workhouse Corporation.

MICHAEL KING, Committed March 22, 1794, by George Pretyma, Esq. charged on suspicion of having bought or received of the aforesaid James Andrews and Mark Pratt, the said fifty pounds weight of wool, or thereabouts, the property of the said Workhouse Corporation.

RICHARD COATES, Committed June 6, 1794, by Henry Bates, D. D. charged on suspicion of felony, in taking and stealing from a sleeping-room in the dwelling-house of Joseph Andrews, of Mildenhall, miller, certain pieces of gold coin, viz. one guinea and three half guineas, the property of the said Joseph Andrews.

THOMAS OSBORNE, Committed June 10, 1794, by Thomas Ruggles, Esq. charged on the oath of George Mortlock, of Hundon, in the said county, labourer, with having broke into and entered his dwelling-house, on the morning of the 10th instant, and stealing thereout six quarter-peck loaves, a pot of honey, two shillings in money, and a large table cloth, the property of the said George Mortlock.

JOHN SEELEY, Committed June 10, 1794, by Thomas Ruggles, Esq. charged on the oath of George Mortlock, of Hundon, in the said county, labourer, on suspicion of having broke into and entered the dwelling-house of the said George Mortlock, on the morning of the 10th instant, and stealing thereout six quarter-peck loaves, a pot of honey, two shillings in money, and a large table cloth, the property of the said George Mortlock.

WILLIAM MOOR, Committed June 10, 1794, by Thomas Ruggles, Esq. charged on the oath of George Mortlock, of Hundon, in the said county, labourer, on suspicion with having aided and assisted Thomas Osborne and John Seeley in breaking open and entering the dwelling-house of the said George Mortlock, on the morning of the 10th instant, and stealing thereout six quarter-peck loaves, a pot of honey, two shillings in money, and a large table cloth, the property of the said George Mortlock.

ROBERT BREWSTER, Committed June 17, 1794, charged on the oath of Robert Cafe, on a violent suspicion of stealing and taking away, from and off Brandon warren, in the county aforesaid, one rabbit, the property of Robert Eagle of Wangford, in the said county, warrener.

BENJAMIN BRETT, Committed June 24, 1794, by Dey Seyer, D. D. charged on suspicion of the wilful murder of Thomas Baker, a child, aged three years and eight months, in the Parish of Kedington, otherwise Ketton, which he the said Benjamin Brett hath confessed in part.

JOHN JOYCE, Committed July 31, 1794, by Henry Bates, D. D. charged on the oaths of Dixie Chapman the younger, Robert Brown, and John Cook, with feloniously taking and carrying away one fowl, called a duck, of the value of tenpence, the property of the said Dixie Chapman.

PRISONERS convicted at former ASSIZES.

JOSEPH DUNNINGHAM, Convicted of felony and burglary, at the Summer Assizes 1793, and received judgment of death; but, on condition of being banished to New South Wales for the term of seven years, received his Majesty's pardon.

GEORGE PRIGG, Convicted of burglary, at the last Lent Assizes, and sentenced to be transported for the term of seven years.

SAMUEL POOLEY, Convicted of having received stolen goods, at the last Lent Assizes, and sentenced to be transported for the term of fourteen years.

